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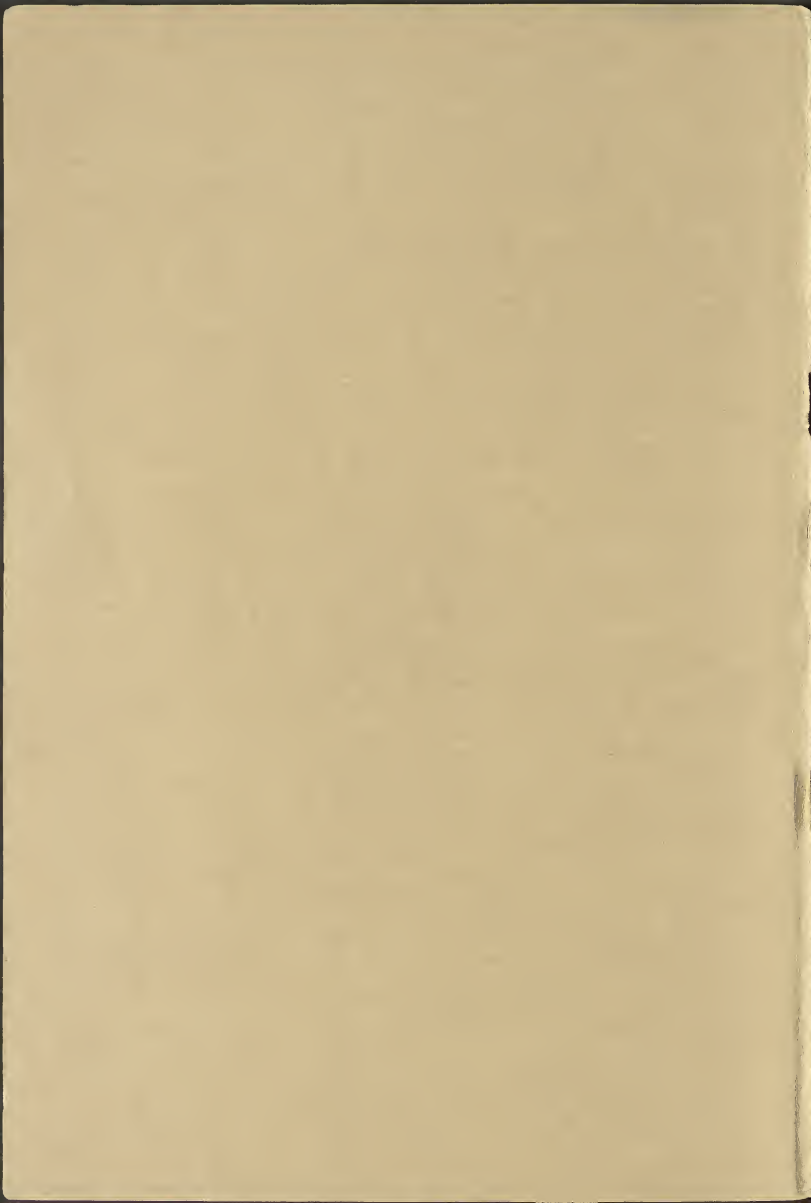
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THE VENERABLE PADRE FRAY
ANTONIO MARGIL DE JESUS

By

REV. PETER P. FORRESTAL, C. S. C., LITT. D.
PROFESSOR OF SPANISH, ST. EDWARD'S UNIVERSITY,
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Reprint from Mid-America
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VENERABLE ANTHONY MARGIL OF JESUS
Order of Friars Minor, Pioneer Missionary of Texas

PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD,
VENERABLE ANTHONY MARGIL OF JESUS

O Lord, Who hast been pleased to glorify, through the mediation of Holy Mother Church, those who during life consecrated themselves to Thy service, we humbly beseech Thee, by the miracles wrought through the intercession of Thy servant, Venerable Anthony Margil of Jesus, to hasten the day when Thy Vicar on earth will permit us to invoke and honor him as our intercessor in Heaven. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(100 days Indulgence)

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PERMISSU SUPERIORUM

JAMES A. BURNS, C. S. C., PH. D.

Provincial, Notre Dame, Indiana

NIHIL OBSTAT

HUGH O'DONNELL, C. S. C., PH. D.

President, St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas

Censor Deputatus

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Archbishop of Chicago

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by

REVEREND PAUL J. FOIK, C. S. C., PH. D.

FOREWORD

It is most opportune that the following work, a summary review of the life and labors of the Venerable Padre Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, has been written from the most authentic and available source materials by Reverend Dr. Peter P. Forrestal, C. S. C. At a time when the cause of the holy servant of God is being resumed with the expectation of his beatification and canonization, it is well that the heroic deeds and virtues which he exercised, the services which he rendered for the evangelization of America and the miracles which he performed should be made known to Catholics for their spiritual edification and consolation. To the people of Texas this brochure has a particular significance, since it tells the story of the saintly Margil's zealous labors in the missions during the time when the conversions of the various Indian tribes here were seriously attempted, and when the permanent settlement of the country actually took place. This soldier of the Cross and his faithful companions, the sons of St. Francis, founded several missions and by their religious activities sowed the first fruitful seeds of Christian civilization in Texas.

The gratitude of the Historical Commission and of the Texas Catholic Historical Society is expressed to the staff of the University of Texas Library, and especially to Professor Carlos E. Castañeda, the Director of the Garcia Latin-American Library, in supplying the documents and other printed materials that have made this work possible. We also wish to thank the Reverend Dr. Gilbert J. Garraghan, S. J., for permission to reprint this contribution as one of the Studies of the Texas Catholic Historical Society.

PAUL J. FOIK, C. S. C., PH. D.
*Chairman of the Commission
 and President of the Society*

DEDICATION

To His Excellency

Most Reverend Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, D.D.

Archbishop of Guadalajara

THE VENERABLE PADRE FRAY ANTOINO MARGIL DE JESUS

by

REV. PETER P. FORRESTAL, C. S. C., LITT. D.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that preacheth the gospel of peace. *Isaias* LII, 7.

Very few missionaries in the history of the Catholic Church have labored with such indefatigable zeal in winning souls for God as did Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, one of the pioneers in New Spain. Although during his life his name was held in reverence and benediction by the inhabitants of practically every town from Panama to Louisiana, and although at the time of his death his obsequies were celebrated in many cities both in the Old and in the New World, today, strange to say, only an occasional scholar north of the Río Grande is acquainted with the missionary activities of this humble but valiant soldier of Christ.

In presenting the following brief sketch of the life and labors of this great servant of God we shall aim at historical accuracy primarily. With this end in view we have made a very careful study of the letters of this venerable priest, the numerous sermons preached, both in America and in Europe, at the time of his death, the *Peregrino Septentrional Atlante* and *Nuevas Empresas*, published by Espinosa in 1737 and 1747 respectively, the *Vida del V. P. Fr. Antonio Margil de Jesús*, published by Vilaplana in 1763, the *Vida* compiled by Arricivita in 1792, and published in the second part of the *Crónica del Apostólico Colegio de Querétaro*, the various documents presented to the Roman curia during the process of beatification and canonization in the last half of the XVIII century, and works of several modern historians to which reference is made in the footnotes.

In the present article we do not propose to give a comprehensive treatment of our subject; we shall do little more than introduce it to our readers, and this with the hope that before long another and a more fluent pen may in a befitting manner describe the activities of this great missionary of New Spain.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Antonio Margil, son of Juan Margil Salumaro and Esperanza Ros, was born in Valencia, Spain, on August 18, 1657, and two days later was baptized in the beautiful church of San Juan del

Mercado, which afterwards came to be known as los Santos Juanes Bautista y Evangelista. When still only a mere boy he showed promise of rare talent and virtue, and, because of this, his truly Christian parents procured for him teachers capable of developing in him studious and virtuous habits. When not at school, where he made rapid progress in his studies, he spent most of his time in building miniature altars at home or in serving Mass and making visits to the Blessed Sacrament in one of the many churches of Valencia. According to several witnesses, whose declarations were recorded by the public and apostolic notary in the city of Valencia shortly after his death, his one desire during time of vacation was to visit the churches in which the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. There he would become so rapt in prayer and meditation that oftentimes he did not return home till after nightfall. When his mother, realizing that he had been fasting the entire day, used to reprove him for this Antonio would answer respectfully that in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament all this time seemed but an instant and that he would not have left even then had he not been obliged to do so by the sacristan who wished to lock the church.¹

ENTERS THE FRANCISCAN ORDER AND IS ORDAINED

Wishing to consecrate himself entirely to God, at the age of fifteen and with his parents' consent he called at the Convent of La Corona de Cristo² in Valencia and asked to join the ranks of the Friars Minor. The official records containing the names of those admitted into that monastery state that "after Compline, between 5 and 6 o'clock in the afternoon of April 22, 1673, Brother Antonio Margil, a native of Valencia, who had completed the fifteenth year of his age, asked to be admitted as a choir religious into the Convent of La Corona de Cristo; and, in the presence of the community that had assembled for this purpose, received the habit from Fray José Salellas, actual Guardian of said convent."³

In the novitiate Antonio was an exemplar of virtue. He took delight in performing the most menial services, and imposed

¹ Vilaplana, *Vida del V. P. Fr. Antonio Margil de Jesús*, p. 8 (Madrid, 1775).

² So-called because in that convent was preserved half of one of the thorns from the crown of Our Savior.

³ *Summarium beatificationis et canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Antonii Margil a Jesu*, no. 5, p. 50, sec. 48.

upon himself such severe penances that the Master of Novices took away from him the hair-shirt and forbade him to use the discipline and other instruments of torture with which he was wont to lacerate his flesh. On April 25, 1674, before completing his seventeenth year, he made his religious profession in this same convent of La Corona de Cristo. As a professed religious Antonio made even greater efforts to advance in perfection and to detach himself entirely from the world with its allurements. One day, not knowing that he was being observed, he slipped off quietly to the church, and walking over to one of the tombs, raised the slab concealing a body that had been buried there for some time and that was already in a state of decomposition. He remained there beside that tomb until the Master of Novices, who had followed him down to the church, drew near and asked what he was doing. The young novice replied: "Reminding this brute of a body of what it now is and of what it will one day be."⁴

When he was eighteen years of age the superiors, convinced that he had a vocation to the priesthood, sent him to the Convent of San Antonio in Denia, where, according to the sworn declaration of Fray Vicente Andani, who had been a seminarian with him in the aforesaid convent and who testified in Guatemala on March 6, 1727, young Margil made constant progress in virtue and was greatly respected and admired by all because of his deep humility, his jovial disposition and winning ways. After he had completed a three years' course in philosophy at Denia he was sent back to La Corona Convent for his theology. Here during the time not devoted to study he followed the regular exercises of the novitiate, and every night after Matins went down quietly to the garden, where, laden with a heavy cross, he followed in the footsteps of the Crucified Christ, pausing to meditate before each of the fourteen Stations erected within the convent walls. When twenty-four years of age he was ordained to the priesthood, and after his first holy Mass, for which he had prepared by prayer, penance, and a humble confession of even the slightest faults, received from the Provincial Chapter an obedience as confessor and preacher in the town of Onda. Here his labors bore such abundant fruit that a short time after his arrival to this town his superiors decided to change him to Denia, a Mediterranean port much frequented by profligates

⁴ Vilaplana, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

from various parts of Europe and greatly in need of the ministrations of a zealous priest.

JOINS THE AMERICAN MISSIONS

He had not been here long before he learned that Fray Antonio Linaz, who belonged to the Majorca Province and who had recently been preaching with remarkable success in many cities of the peninsula, had obtained permission to take with him twenty-five volunteers for the missions in America. Burning with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and realizing that in the far-off Indies the harvest was ready but the laborers were few, young Margil decided to enlist in this little band of missionaries. He took leave of his companions at the Convent of San Antonio, after having asked them to pray for the success of his undertaking, and set out for Valencia in order to pay a visit to the religious at La Corona de Cristo and to bid good-bye to his aged mother, who was now a widow.

His departure was felt keenly by all those religious, who had come to love him from the very day he first called at the novitiate, and it was felt still more keenly by that pious mother who had watched over and guided him during his childhood and who had hoped that he would be present to comfort and console her in her declining years. Informed that Fray Antonio was determined to leave for the Indies, she was deeply affected, and when he came to bid her good-bye the poor old lady said to him: "Son, how is it that you decide to go off and to leave me now when I was expecting from you some comfort and consolation, when I was hoping that at the time of my death you would assist me, that you would be at my bedside in that hour of trial?"⁵

Antonio, stifling the sentiments of filial love and affection that were welling up in his breast, answered: "Mother, when I entered the monastery I left you, and I took the Blessed Virgin as Mother and Jesus as Father, for at that time I renounced all earthly ties. I am going to labor in the vineyard of the Master, to see if I can please my beloved Jesus. You will find consolation in the Lord, for His Divine Majesty will take care of you and, if He so permit, I shall not fail to assist you at the hour of your death. Do not be afflicted, mother, by these natural sentiments; we must leave all in the hands of Providence. Take

⁵ Espinosa, *El Peregrino Septentrional Atlante*, p. 37.

this habit, which, with my superior's permission, I leave you in order that you may be buried in it. The fact that my brother-in-law and my sister remain here is for me a source of consolation.⁶ With all my heart I commend you to their care and, in case you be deprived of their assistance, my Father Jesus will take care of my mother Esperanza."⁷

Antonio cast himself at his mother's feet, and, having received her last blessing, turned his back upon his childhood's home and took the road leading to Cádiz. Shortly afterwards he and the other missionaries sailed from the aforesaid port, and after a three months' voyage, during which their lives were frequently in peril, they landed at Vera Cruz on June 6, 1683. At this port a most sad spectacle met their gaze. Shortly before their arrival the pirate Lorencillo⁸ had sacked the city, desecrating the churches, and murdering or crippling great numbers of the inhabitants. Margil, deeply pained, hastened to the assistance of that wretched people, and spared no sacrifice in ministering to the dying, in burying the dead and in consoling the afflicted.

REACHES QUERETARO

A few days later, accompanied by one of his companions and provided with nothing but a staff, a breviary and a crucifix, he set out for Santa Cruz Convent in the City of Querétaro. On August 13th, after having given missions at all the towns and ranches along the way, he walked into the Convent of Santa Cruz, which, now erected into a college and seminary, was soon to send forth missionaries to all parts of the New World.⁹ On the first Sunday of the following month he opened a mission in Querétaro, and the inhabitants, observing that he spoke to them

⁶ Vilaplana uses the plural. Antonio had two sisters, one that was married and another that later on entered La Puridad Convent.

⁷ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸ Fray Rogerio Conde Martínez, O.F.M., in his brochure on Margil states that the pirate was English and that his real name was Lawrence Jacome. At the celebration held in the Spanish capital in 1928, on the occasion of the VII centennial of the death of Saint Francis this work (Madrid, *Imprenta Minuesa*, 1929) was awarded the prize for the best treatise on Margil, offered by His Excellency Dr. Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, beloved Archbishop of Guadalajara, noted benefactor of an afflicted people and humble but fearless apostle of Christ.

⁹ At Santa Cruz College, with which Margil was now connected and which, as other Apostolic Colleges, was under the supervision of a Commissary-General for the Indies, the friars received special training for the work on the missions.

with all the unction and sincerity of the anointed of God, and learning that he was accustomed to spend the entire day and most of the night in works of penance and in acts of charity, of humility and of love of God, flocked to the churches, confessed their sins and made a firm purpose of amendment. This mission finished, he set out for Mexico City, the emporium of the Western Hemisphere, where, with the assistance of several other religious, he succeeded in eradicating vice and in implanting such beautiful virtues as might have incited to emulation the most Catholic communities in Christendom.

Leaving the capital, he retraced his steps to Santa Cruz College, where he was most punctual in his attendance at the religious exercises, and where each night after Matins he made the Stations with a heavy cross over his shoulder and a crown of thorns upon his head, thereby unconsciously impressing upon his saintly companions the necessity of exemplifying in their own lives the doctrines of Christianity and of trampling under foot the world with its seductions before hoping to bring the pagan nations of America under the yoke of Christ.

GOES TO YUCATAN

Fray Antonio had been here about three months when he and three other religious received the obedience to labor for the spread of the faith among the barbarous tribes of Campeche or Yucatán.¹⁰ Responsive to that call, the four zealous missionaries left immediately for Vera Cruz, and while waiting for the boat to weigh anchor gave a mission at the Castle of San Juan de Ulúa.¹¹

Accompanied by their Commissary-General, Fray Juan Luzuriaga, who was making his visitation of the American missions and who was soon to preside at the Chapter in Mérida, they crossed Campeche Bay, arriving at their new field of labor on Holy Saturday, April 1st of the same year, 1684.¹² Losing no time, they gave a mission at the port and at each of the towns, villages and *haciendas* along the road to Mérida, capital of the province.

¹⁰ Campeche and Yucatán are now separate states.

¹¹ This fortress overlooks and defends the port of Vera Cruz.

¹² Vilaplana, on page 25, states that they landed here in March, 1686. Here there is an evident discrepancy; Vilaplana himself, on page 31, tells us that after leaving Campeche they went to Guatemala and arrived there on September 21, 1685.

At the Chapter now being held in this city the Commissary-General proposed that the Recollection-Institute, which for so many years had flourished there, be reëstablished and that one of the four missionaries that had accompanied him from Vera Cruz be appointed as Guardian. But, finding that not one of these cared to accept the office and that all were burning with the desire to carry the light of the gospel to nations that for centuries had sat in the darkness of paganism and superstition, he allowed them to leave for the Kingdom of Guatemala.

Happy in the thought that they were soon to bring to innumerable pagan tribes a knowledge of Christianity, they set out on their journey, but on reaching the mouth of the Tabasco River three pirate vessels gave them chase, and only by a miracle of God were they able to escape with their lives and to return, after eight days of mental and physical anguish, to the Port of Campeche. They presented themselves before the Commissary-General, who was stopping at this port, and who, apprised of their ill fortune, addressed them in these words: "To me this seems a chastisement from God for not having remained here to establish the institute. I now command you to offer up special prayers in order that God may enlighten you as to the course you are to follow."¹³

Without the slightest manifestation of reluctance, they repaired to the choir, and after they had prayed there for a long time the superior called them, and in their presence had a little child draw lots in order to determine the will of God with regard to their future activities. On slips of paper drawn by the hand of that innocent child it was indicated that Fray Antonio Margil and Fray Melchor López were to go to the missions and that the other two religious were to remain in Mérida.

Imbued with the spirit of Paul and Barnabas, these two apostles of Christ, destined to be inseparable companions for fourteen years in the work of planting the good seed in the fallow lands of Guatemala, went forth once more on their sacred mission and arrived happily in the Province of Tabasco. For one whole year their days were spent in announcing the truths of Christianity in the towns and hamlets of this province and the greater part of the nights in keeping vigil before a beautiful crucifix which had been given to them at the aforesaid port and which they were to carry with them on all their travels.

¹³ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Famished with hunger, drenched with rain, broken in health, but undaunted in spirit, these barefooted sons of Saint Francis, leaving behind them the Province of Tabasco, trudged along southward as far as Tuxtla in the present State of Chiapas. Here they became gravely ill, and Fray Antonio was given the last sacraments; but, miraculously cured, they continued on as far as Ciudad Real, where their deep humility and their burning zeal for souls made such an impression on the inhabitants that many of both sexes dressed in sackcloth and joined the Third Order of Saint Francis. After converting the people of Ciudad Real they entered Soconusco on the shores of the Pacific, and as they passed through this province, announcing the glad tidings of salvation, thousands of people, with green branches in their hands and with holy joy in their hearts, came forth to receive those angels of peace, the fame of whose sanctity had already reached the utmost confines of Spanish America.¹⁴

LABORS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Traveling by a circuitous route for a distance of more than one hundred leagues and preaching the word of God in all the towns through which they passed, Fray Antonio and Fray Melchor reached the capital of Guatemala, and entered the Convent of San Francisco a little after 1 o'clock on the morning of September 21, 1685.¹⁵ But, shortly after their arrival these messengers of peace were summoned to Itzquintipeque to put an end to dissension and discord that had arisen between two companies of Spanish soldiers stationed on that coast, and as a result not until the beginning of the new year were they able to open the mission in the capital of Guatemala. For more than six months they preached in the cathedral, convents and other churches, and long after the mission had closed all the priests of the city were still busy hearing the confessions of the multitudes that, actuated by the fear and love of God, hastened to wash away their sins in the sacrament of penance.

From the capital they continued their journey southward, and, in 1688, entered Nicaragua, Nicoya and Costa Rica, pro-

¹⁴ Fray Juan López Aguado, *Voces que Hicieron Eco.*, p. 20 (Mexico, 1726). "Láurea Funeral Americana," in García Library, Texas University.

¹⁵ Conde, page 60, tells us that on September 21, 1685, Margil was back in Querétaro. This is obviously an oversight, for on page 46 of the same work he states that on this date he arrived in Guatemala. Strange to say, he falls into exactly the same error with regard to December 2, 1691.

claiming the kingdom of God and exercising such a salutary influence that the natives, of their own accord, destroyed their idols and cut down the trees from which they had been gathering the fruit for their *chicha* and for their other intoxicating beverages. Whenever possible, they reached a *pueblo* about sundown, and, with crucifix in hand, walked through the streets announcing the mission and warning the inhabitants to hearken to the voice of God and to confess their sins. In each of those towns they erected the Way of the Cross, taught the people to recite the rosary and to sing the *Alabado*.¹⁶

Learning that there still remained vast regions in which the light of faith had not as yet penetrated, the discalced sons of the poor little man of Assisi turned east, and, suffering untold hardships in crossing bleak mountains and barren deserts, with scarcely enough food to keep them from starvation and with no guide other than the position of the sun and the stars, made their way into the interior of Talamanca.¹⁷ With the assistance of some of the natives, who from contact with the Christians of Costa Rica had come to appreciate the blessings of our holy faith and through the good offices of several caciques, who realized that men who at such sacrifice had entered the territory of an unfriendly people with no weapon but the cross could be none others than messengers of the true God, they succeeded in establishing eleven *pueblos* and in making thousands of converts.

Success seemed to attend their labors in this new vineyard of the Lord, until certain tribes, incited to rebellion by their pagan priests, burned the church of San Miguel and threatened to take the lives of the missionaries. Saved from certain death only by a miracle, those two living exemplars of Christian fortitude, following the example of their illustrious prototypes at Antioch,¹⁸ gathered up from the ground handfuls of dust and, casting it into the air as a sign of their unworthiness of eternal life, left them and went off to preach to the Terrabas.¹⁹

¹⁶ During our recent sojourn in Spain it was for several months our happy privilege to celebrate Mass at the Patronato de los Enfermos in Madrid and to hear this beautiful hymn of praise to the Blessed Sacrament sung on Sundays and feast days by the poor children and working classes of the capital, whose spiritual and corporal needs are ministered to by faithful and devout chaplains and by the self-sacrificing Damas Apostólicas founded by Doña Luz Casanova.

¹⁷ A long strip of territory on the Atlantic seaboard of Costa Rica.

¹⁸ Acts, XIII.

¹⁹ Terrabas and Borucas: tribes inhabiting the southern portion of Costa Rica.

After they had instructed the friendly Borucas on the boundary of Costa Rica they came to the land of the Terrabas. These, struck with holy awe at the sight of the saintly missionaries, cast at their feet the weapons with which they had gone forth to receive them, and learning that they could not be saved until they had abandoned their ancient rites and practices, they burnt their idols, razed to the ground their places of pagan worship, and built two temples to the God of the Christians. Fray Melchor remained here, while Fray Antonio journeyed back to convert the incendiaries of San Miguel; but, on August 25, 1691, when both were about to leave for Panama, they received from their Commissary-General an order to report to Santa Cruz College in Querétaro. Though regretting to leave those missions, the barefooted friars began immediately that long journey of more than six hundred leagues, and that they did so in the spirit of perfect obedience is evident from a letter which they sent to the Guardian of said college from one of the towns of Costa Rica.²⁰

As soon as they walked into the capital of Guatemala, on December 2nd, the President of the *Audiencia* of that city notified them that their Commissary-General, informed of their great apostolic labors and of the work yet to be done, had sent a counter order instructing them to remain in Central America. They did not advance another step, but, at the request of Bishop Andrés de las Navas, set out for Vera Paz to pacify certain *pueblos* that had revolted, and about five months later were called back to the capital to establish a hospice for missionaries. While awaiting the royal *cedula* authorizing this foundation, they suffered great hardships and imperiled their lives in leading back to the fold the apostate Choles of El Manché, and in endeavoring to convert the ferocious savages of the mountains of Lacandón, that long before had martyred two Dominican priests, Fray Andrés López and Fray Domingo de Vico.

Undertaking the last journey he was to make with that zealous apostle who for fourteen years had been his inseparable companion on the missions and who was soon to be appointed President of the new hospice, Margil made his way into the territory of the Lacandones; but, after enduring extreme hunger and thirst for several months and after braving death itself in the hope of evangelizing that indomitable people, he realized that

²⁰ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

the hour for their conversion had not as yet arrived, and decided to return to the City of Guatemala.²¹

One year later, January 17, 1695, that zealous missionary, accompanied by the President of the *Audiencia* and six hundred soldiers, again walked barefooted up the craggy heights of Lacandón, and after a sojourn of two years, during which he always spent from midnight till daybreak on his knees in communion with God, succeeded in exterminating idolatry and in establishing the Christian faith in all that country.

ELECTED GUARDIAN OF SANTA CRUZ

Here he labored with marked success until March, 1697, when, to the deep sorrow of his spiritual children, who had come to love him as a father and who were now to be deprived of his ministrations, he was recalled to Querétaro as Guardian of Santa Cruz. Without hesitation he answered the call of obedience, and after preaching in all the towns along his route, that great apostle of America, so fittingly titled *Atlante Peregrino* by his illustrious colaborer and biographer,²² reached Querétaro on the afternoon of April 22nd of this same year.²³ That day the entire community and all others that had gone forth to welcome him at the entrance to the city beheld, indeed, a novel spectacle as the far-famed missionary came along that dusty road in the patched habit which he had worn in Guatemala, with an old hat thrown over his back and a skull hanging from his girdle.

As superior of Santa Cruz College, he evinced those admirable virtues of charity and humility that had characterized his work on the missions. He looked after the corporal as well as the spiritual needs of his subjects, built an infirmary for the sick religious, and considered himself merely as a weak instrument of the divine will, each night offering the keys of the cloister and of the hearts of his subjects to Jesus and Mary,

²¹ Fray Francisco de S. Esteban y Andrade, *Titulo Glorioso del Crucificado con Cristo y Segunda Azucena de la Religión Seráfica*, p. 15 (Mexico, 1729). See "Laurea Funeral Americana."

²² Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa and Fray Antonio Margil worked together on the missions in Texas, Espinosa as superior of the missionaries from Santa Cruz and Margil as superior of those from Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

²³ Conde states that Margil arrived here on April 2nd. This is probably a typographical error.

the true Guardians of that convent.²⁴ During the period of his guardianship at this college his days and nights, save three hours given to repose, were spent in penance and prayer, and in gaining souls for Christ, not only by his work in the confessional, but by the simple yet heart-stirring sermons which he preached on the streets of Querétaro. On several occasions his insatiable zeal led him out of this city to distant places, and numberless souls resolved to abandon sin and turn to God as he thundered forth the warning to repentance in the churches and on the plazas of Valladolid, Mexico City and Celaya.

FOUNDS COLLEGE IN GUATEMALA

In 1700, he finished his term as Guardian, and in April of the following year was called to Guatemala to establish peace between the people and the Royal *Audiencia*. Without taking leave of the citizens of Querétaro, once more he set out on that long journey of almost four hundred leagues, and toward the end of May or the beginning of June, after having preached and heard confessions along the way, that messenger of peace reached the capital of Guatemala, where he settled the disputed questions to the satisfaction of both parties.

On June 13th he founded in this city a seminary *de Propaganda Fide*, the nucleus of which was to be composed of the religious until then living at the Calvario Hospice, and, prompted by those same motives which at the age of seven had led him to place himself in the arms of Christ Crucified, named it El Colegio de Cristo Crucificado.²⁵ In the Provincial Chapter held soon afterwards he was elected Guardian of this college by those saintly religious, who, acquainted with his missionary activities of fourteen years in Central America, realized that no other could direct so successfully the destinies of the new institute. Those virtuous men had cast their votes according to the dictates of conscience and they were not to be disappointed in their choice. Fray Antonio, by his faithful adherence to the rules of Saint Francis, inspired them to exemplify in their own lives the beautiful virtues of charity and humility, and by his continuous and arduous labors in the confessional and pulpit, aroused in them that spirit of self-sacrificing zeal so necessary for the work of the missions. Like the Apostle of the Gentiles, he preached

²⁴ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²⁵ Vilaplana, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Christ in season and out of season, and on Christmas night spoke for several hours on the plaza of the capital city endeavoring to prevent the scandalous abuses so common on this most sacred of festivals.

On a certain occasion, when preaching in the Cathedral of Guatemala, he took as his text the brevity of life and the uncertainty of death. In the course of the sermon he remarked, to the astonishment of his audience, that all those then present would not hear him on the following day, because before that time one of them would have been called to render a strict account before the Supreme Judge. Scarcely had he uttered the last words of the sermon when, according to the testimony of Father Jerónimo Varona of the Society of Jesus, who was present at the time, a woman fell dead between the Main Altar and Socorro Chapel, not having had even enough time to make her confession.²⁶

Satisfied that the rules of the Order were being faithfully observed by all the subjects of that holy institute and that the doctrines of Christianity were being practiced by the inhabitants of Guatemala, he set out for Nicaragua and, after a journey of some two hundred leagues, reached the City of León about the end of May, 1703. He left this capital, and in a torrential rain made his way through swamps and over swollen creeks to the towns of Telica, Sevaco, and Granada, denouncing witchcraft, demon worship and superstition, and awakening in the lukewarm Christians of those parts a sincere detestation of idolatry and a deep sense of their obligations as followers of the Crucified Christ.²⁷

In about three months he was back in the City of Guatemala, but he had been here only a short time when summoned to the Pacific Coast to correct certain flagrant abuses that had crept into the provinces of San Antonio Suchitepéquez²⁸ and Zapotitlán, whose inhabitants, Christians only in name, still clung to the ancient rites and ceremonies of their ancestors.²⁹ That his

²⁶ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²⁷ Later on the capital was changed to Managua, which, as León, is situated on the Pacific.

²⁸ On the Pacific in the southwestern part of Guatemala.

²⁹ Even at the present day much the same may be said of several of the Indian *pueblos* of New Mexico. It is to be hoped that before long the work of the zealous Franciscan Fathers of this state will be crowned with the success that in Central America attended the labors of their illustrious coreligious.

mission was entirely successful is evident from the report which the *corregidor* of Zapotitlán made to the Royal *Audiencia* of Guatemala on October 12, 1704. This report states that with the visit of Fray Antonio the province became a veritable paradise of God, for at all hours the people, that until then had been steeped in the most shameful vices, could be seen, both in the homes and on the streets, chanting the *Alabado*, or reciting the rosary and other prayers in honor of their Eucharistic Lord and of His Most Blessed Mother.³⁰

FOUNDs COLLEGE IN ZACATECAS

As soon as his term of office had expired this giant pilgrim of America, accompanied by another religious, started out once more for Costa Rica with the hope of advancing farther southward and of bringing into the faith the numerous tribes of Panama and Peru; but, on July 25, 1706, as he was about to climb the Talamanca Mountains he received from the Commissary-General an order to return to Mexico for the purpose of establishing a new college on the outskirts of Zacatecas. Though he yearned for the conversion of those pagan nations and though his companion urged him to continue on his way, that slave of holy obedience, retracing his steps, began the long, wearisome journey to the scene of his future labors.³¹ Upon reaching the City of Guatemala he called at the College of Cristo Crucificado to visit the religious, of whom he had been a kind superior and whom he was never more to see,³² and after addressing to them words of counsel and comfort bade them good-bye and continued his journey northward.

Faithful to his custom of preaching the word of God in all the towns and ranches through which he passed, the tireless apostle continued on until he came to Mexico City, where he spent a few days consulting the Commissary-General on certain points relative to the new foundation. During the months of November and December he was at Santa Cruz in Querétaro, and from this college took with him to Zacatecas five religious,

³⁰ Espinosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 208.

³¹ Fray Francisco de S. Esteban y Andrade, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³² In 1708, upon the death of Fray Tomás de Arrivillaga, Guardian of the College of Cristo Crucificado, the Royal *Audiencia* of Guatemala begged Margil to accept this office. He wrote back that his heart was in Guatemala and that if possible he would fly to that kingdom, but that this was impossible, since the Commissary-General held him bound by the well-riveted chains of obedience.

who, with those already living at the Hospice of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, were to form the little community at the Apostolic Institute about to be established.

January 12, 1707, should always be a memorable day in the history of the Church in Mexico, for it was on this day that her greatest of apostles entered the College of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at the foothills of the Zacatecas Mountains and, casting himself on his knees before the image of Our Blessed Mother, thanked her for having watched over him during that long journey of more than six hundred leagues from the wilds of Costa Rica and commended to her care the destinies of an institute that was soon to play an important part in the work of evangelization in North America.³³

From the very outset the new foundation began to grow both in a spiritual and a material way, and within a decade able and zealous missionaries from Zacatecas were spreading the doctrines of Christ in Northern Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana. In August of this same year, 1707, Margil, at the request of the Bishop of Guadalajara, left his college for three months to give missions in the capital and in several towns of Jalisco, and he spent the spring and summer of the following year laboring throughout the diocese of Durango.

Toward the close of the year 1708, he went to Querétaro to confer with the Commissary-General on certain matters of importance, and while there was asked to preside at the Chapter of the Zacatecas Province. Prior to the Chapter, which was convoked in San Luis Potosí on February 23, 1709, and which proved to be most successful in every way, Margil preached missions in this capital and in many of the neighboring towns. At the close of the Provincial Chapter he left for Zacatecas and preached and heard confessions at each of the towns and ranches at which he happened to pass the night. He reached Guadalupe College about the middle of Lent, and as religious from several of the provinces had entered the new institute a short time previously, he decided to spend the following year at the college in order to train for the work of the missions the young men committed to his care. During this year his voice was frequently heard in the churches and on the plaza of Zacatecas, and on one occasion he miraculously escaped death at the hands of certain comedians,

³³ The royal cedula authorizing the erection of the Hospice into an Apostolic College was granted by Philip V in 1704, but did not reach America till 1706. See Sotomayor, *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 32.

whose performances he denounced publicly and whom he finally induced to abandon that life of sin and turn to God.

During March of 1711, in obedience to a cedula of Philip V, Margil undertook the conversion of certain barbarous tribes in the mountains of Nayarit. Accompanied by another religious from Guadalupe College and by four Indians, he set out for those mountains, and on May 9th sent from the town of Santa María de Guazamota a letter informing the barbarians of his coming and assuring them that no motive other than the desire to save them from hell induced him to enter their province. After five days two Indians whom he had dispatched with this message returned with the information that those barbarians, in answer to Fray Antonio's letter, had stated that they would at all costs cling to their pagan practices, that they were not afraid of the Spanish soldiers, and that under no condition would they embrace Christianity. Nothing daunted, both missionaries entered those mountains, but, though ready for every sacrifice, even that of life itself, in the effort to convert that obstinate people, they came to realize that the hour of their conversion, according to the inscrutable designs of God, had not as yet arrived, and decided to return to their college.

For two years Margil endeavored to prevail upon the Viceroy in Mexico City and upon the Royal *Audiencia* of Guadalajara to assist him in the work of converting the pagans of Nayarit; but, seeing that the proposed expedition to that province was being postponed indefinitely he decided, after being relieved of his duties as Guardian in November, 1713, to carry his spiritual conquests into the New Kingdom of León and across the Río Grande.³⁴

With the permission of the Commissary-General and of the new Guardian,³⁵ and accompanied by another Friar, once more he left the College of Guadalupe, and during the early part of 1714, gave missions in Mazapil, Saltillo and Monterrey and in several other towns of Zacatecas, Coahuila and Nuevo León. In the month of May he reached the Sabinas River and on its banks established and dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe the first mission founded among the pagan Indians by the Zacatecas Institute. He had been here but a short time when the Tobosos

³⁴ Only a few years later missionaries of the Society of Jesus, to their great glory be it said, succeeded in spreading the Gospel throughout most of this territory.

³⁵ Fray José Guerra.

swooped down upon the neighboring *pueblo* of San Miguel, tore to pieces the sacred vestments, and stripped and threatened to take the life of the missionary. Through the assistance of certain members of this tribe that had once been Christians, the *Padre*, almost naked, succeeded in making his escape to the Mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. He reached the thatched hut constructed by Fray Antonio, who, learning of his happy escape and considering this a signal victory for the cause of Christianity, led him in triumph into the church, ordered that the bells be rung, and intoned the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving.

As the Tobosos still continued their depredations, the Indians that had been congregated at Guadalupe fled back to the mountains, and the three missionaries, seeing that under the circumstances any effort to reestablish the *pueblos* was useless, left for the Dolores Mission at Punta de Lampazos.³⁶ Though all hope of erecting a mission near the Sabinas had vanished, Fray Antonio was not discouraged. Awaiting the opportunity to labor among the Texas across the Río Grande, he spent the remainder of that year and the beginning of 1715, in preaching and hearing confessions among the Christians in Nuevo León. Toward the close of 1715, or in the early part of 1716, he set out, with a military escort, for the Mission of San Juan Bautista, located on the Río Grande del Norte, near the present town of Piedras Negras. Though suffering from double hernia, he walked all the way from Lampazos to the Sabinas River, where, in spite of all protestations, the corporal of the guard insisted that he make the rest of the journey on horseback. Having reached the Río Grande, he preached to the soldiers at the presidio and introduced the Third Order at the Mission of San Juan; but, finding that he could not establish here a mission for the pagan Indians, he decided to return to the scene of his recent labors in Coahuila and in the New Kingdom of León.³⁷

³⁶ The Dolores Mission was seven leagues north of that erected by Margil and was founded, in 1698, by Fray Francisco Hidalgo and Fray Diego de Salazar. It should not be confused with the Dolores Mission founded ten years previously at Boca de Leones, or modern Villa-Aldama.

³⁷ Because of the scarcity of priests on the San Xavier missions and in order to take care of the new missions among the Apaches, Santa Cruz College, in 1751, was obliged to turn over to the secular clergy that of San Juan Bautista, founded about fifty years previously. See Bolton, *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century*, p. 239.

FOUNDERS TEXAS MISSIONS

In the fall of 1715, steps had been taken to reestablish the long neglected missions on the Neches and thus to prevent further encroachment of the French upon Spanish territory. To accomplish this an escort of twenty-five soldiers, under Captain Domingo Ramón, was to accompany into the country of the Hasinai, or Texas, Indians a mission band from the College of Santa Cruz in Querétaro and another from the College of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Zacatecas. The former, composed of five priests, was to have as superior Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa, and the latter, made up of three priests, two lay-brothers and one Donado, was to be under the direction of Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús. The superior of the Zacatecas band was still busy visiting the towns and ranches of Nuevo León when, in the spring of 1716, word reached him that the expedition was already on the Río Grande and was about to leave for Texas. Without delay he set out to join his companions, but along the way he became gravely ill and had to be taken to the Mission of San Juan Bautista, where his condition became so critical that he was given the last sacraments. Urged by Margil himself not to postpone the *entrada*, on April 25th, the missionaries of both colleges bade farewell to their beloved friend and collaborer, and the expedition, having crossed the Río Grande, moved northeastward to the country of the Hasinai, which had originally comprised nothing more than the strip of territory between the Trinity and Red rivers and part of what is now the State of Louisiana.³⁸

The founder of Guadalupe College and superior of its little band of Texas missionaries had for many years yearned for the conversion of the Hasinai; he had redoubled his fasts, watched late into the night, and sacrificed everything life holds dear that one day he might be able to bring to this and to kindred tribes a knowledge of the true faith. His heartfelt prayer for the conversion of this people was born of the ardent zeal which had led

³⁸ *Informe que se dió al Excmo. Sr. Presidente de la República Mexicana sobre límites de la Provincia de Tejas*, p. 6. (Zacatecas, 1828; *Imprenta del Supremo Gobierno*.) Dr. Bolton, *op. cit.*, p. 2, tells us that the Hasinai "comprised some ten or more tribes, of which the best known were the Hainai, Nacogdoche, Nabadache, Nasoni and Nadaco." He states also, p. 1, that "early in the eighteenth century the boundaries [of Texas] were extended westward to include the settlements on the San Antonio River and Matagorda Bay." See also Bancroft, *The North Mexican States*, Vol. I, p. 604, note 2.

him into Talamanca, Lacandón and Nayarit, and, at least in part, that prayer was not to remain unanswered. Margil, completely recovered, soon left the San Juan Mission and, following the route taken by the Ramón expedition, advanced toward the territory of the Texas Indians. When he overtook his companions he learned, to his great joy, that they had been well received by the natives and had been meeting with remarkable success in explaining to them the truths of Christianity and in inducing them to abandon their wild, nomadic life.³⁹

The expedition reached the country of the Hasinai, in the eastern section of the present State of Texas, in the summer of 1716, and, setting to work immediately, the missionaries from both colleges made every effort to instruct the natives and to induce them to establish *pueblos*. The Friars from Zacatecas, in whom we are especially interested, began their labors with the Nacogdoches, and among them, near the banks of the Angelina, established their first mission, dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe.⁴⁰ At this mission Fray Antonio and his companions spent the remainder of this year, using a thatched hut as a dwelling, enduring every kind of hardship, mingling with the rude and illiterate natives, and endeavoring to impress upon their rude mentalities the grandeur and sublimity of the Christian religion with the hope of gaining souls for heaven.

Informed by the Nacogdoches that certain neighboring and friendly tribes might willingly receive the light of faith, in January of the following year Margil journeyed eastward to the territory of the Ais, and among them, at what is at present the

³⁹ The date of Margil's arrival to East Texas is not at all clear; the fact that he is not mentioned in either the Espinosa or the Ramón Diaries after the expedition had crossed the Río Grande would seem to indicate that he did not rejoin the expedition until after it had reached the territory of the Hasinai. On the other hand, the *Informe* cited in note 38 states, page 19, that the expedition, *accompanied by Margil*, entered the Province of Texas on June 28th. Espinosa tells us that Margil did not leave San Juan Bautista till the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, which falls on June 13th. There is, however, in the Zacatecas Archives a letter written by Margil to Fray Antonio Andrade, and dated May 29, 1716, *desde el camino hacia los Texas*. From several of his letters, which are preserved in the said archives and which state that "*we entered Texas with only twenty-five men*," it would seem clear that he overtook the expedition somewhere along the route.

⁴⁰ In the center of the present town of Nacogdoches Doctor Bolton has located the site of the old Mission of Guadalupe. See *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, April, 1908. At this same time the Santa Cruz missionaries founded San Francisco de los Tejas, La Purísima Concepción, and San José de los Nazones, somewhat north of the Zacatecas missions.

Town of San Augustine, established the Mission of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores. During March he crossed the Sabine, and at the site now occupied by the Town of Robeline, Louisiana, fifty leagues due east from Dolores and not far south of Shamrock and Spanish Lake,⁴¹ founded San Miguel de los Adaes and left at this mission Fray Agustín Patrón, one of the Friars that had accompanied him from Mexico.⁴² From Dolores, for which he had a special affection and at which he spent the greater part of the year, he made regular visits to the other missions, and on several occasions, carrying with him the sacred vestments, walked from San Miguel to the French presidio at Natchitoches, a distance of about ten leagues, and there said Mass, preached, and heard the confessions of the soldiers.

Those were, indeed, years of trial for the religious in East Texas. Since their arrival they had received no letters from their brethren in either Spain or Mexico, and when, in August of 1718, Margil learned that almost two years previously he had again been elected Guardian of Guadalupe College he wrote to his superior, requesting that, as the term was then drawing to a close and as he was hundreds of leagues distant from Zacatecas, his resignation be accepted and that he be permitted to remain on the missions. Here Margil and the other missionaries suffered untold hardships and at times had scarcely enough food to keep body and soul together. 1717 and 1718 were years of veritable famine in East Texas; the corn and bean crops were a failure, the scant supply of provisions the missionaries had brought with them from Mexico had become exhausted a few months after their arrival, and for a time all they could secure to stave off starvation was the flesh of crows.⁴³ In 1717, the Querétaro and Zacatecas colleges, with authorization of the Viceroy, sent a supply of provisions to the *Padres*. The expedition, comprised of a few missionaries with an escort of fifteen soldiers, reached the Trinity before Christmas of the same year, but, as this river was overflowing its banks for a distance of

⁴¹ For further data on the location of these missions consult Bolton, *op. cit.*; also his letter to Father Engelhardt, published in the *Franciscan Herald*, August, 1915.

⁴² With regard to the Friars that accompanied this expedition there seems to be some divergence of opinion. Consult the Espinosa *Diary* for April 25th, the *Crónica*, I, 417, and the Ramón *Diary* for April 22nd.

⁴³ *Mexicana Beatificationis et canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Antonii Margil a Jesu: De Temperantia*, XXX, 32, (Typographia Rev. Camerae Apostolicae). Consult also *Información de Sucesidos a N. V. P.*, article 186. (*Proceso de Guadalupe*.)

about two leagues and as there was little hope of its waters subsiding, the supplies were buried in a woods west of the river, and, by means of some Texas Indians that happened to be in those parts, a letter was sent to the missionaries with information as to the location of the hidden supplies. The expedition returned to the Río Grande, but, due to impassable roads, the letter did not reach its destination until July 22nd of the following year.

In these pages we cannot dwell at length upon this glorious chapter in the History of the Church in Texas, but those of our readers acquainted with the Castilian tongue can find in the first part of the *Crónica Apostólica y Seráfica*, written by Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa, superior of the religious from Querétaro, a simple, yet beautiful and detailed, account of the sufferings and hardships endured by those zealous pioneers during their first two years of missionary activities among the Hasinai.

In 1719, war broke out between Spain and France, and in June of this year the commandant of the French fort at Natchitoches, without orders from superior officers, made an unexpected attack upon San Miguel, captured a lay-brother and an unarmed soldier, the only persons present at the time, and seized the sacred vestments and whatever else was to be found at the mission. On the way back to the fort the commandant was pitched from his mount, and in the confusion that resulted the lay-brother, putting spurs to his horse, dashed into a nearby woods, eluded his pursuers, and, making his escape to one of the neighboring missions, warned Fray Antonio and the other *Padres* of the impending danger. The religious from both colleges and the few soldiers stationed at those missions recognized at once the utter impossibility of coping with an enemy so well equipped and retired to a place of relative safety; but, seeing that, in spite of repeated and insistent appeals, the royal officials in Mexico were taking no active measures to restore those missions, on October 3rd all withdrew to the Mission of San Antonio, located more than two hundred leagues to the southwest of Natchitoches. In the meantime another and a more pressing appeal for assistance was sent to the Viceroy, and while awaiting results Fray Antonio ministered to the spiritual wants of the soldiers at the presidio, and on the banks of the San Antonio

River established the Mission of San José, which was soon to become one of the most famous of the Zacatecas Province.⁴⁴

Finally, on April 4, 1721, the long expected expedition, made up of five hundred men, under the Marquis of San Miguel de Aguayo, Governor of Coahuila, reached the presidio of San Antonio.⁴⁵ Here it was joined by Father Margil and by the other Texas missionaries from Santa Cruz and from Guadalupe. On May 13th the entire expedition left San Antonio, and, during the march, each morning several Masses were celebrated, and at night a catechetical instruction was given, followed by the singing of the *Alabado*.⁴⁶ Traveling in a northeasterly direction, the expedition passed close to the sites at present occupied by the towns of New Braunfels, San Marcos, Austin,⁴⁷ Rockdale and Waco, and, having crossed the Trinity, toward the end of July entered the territory of the Hasinai. Both missionaries and soldiers received a warm welcome from the natives, and the cacique of the Adaes, whom all Texas tribes recognized as their leader, assured them that all had been impatiently awaiting the return of the Spaniards and that had they delayed any longer he himself would gladly have gone to San Antonio to seek them.⁴⁸

Shortly after the arrival of Aguayo, the French commandant, reluctantly but without offering any resistance, agreed to evacuate all Spanish territory and to withdraw to his fort at Natchitoches; a presidio, garrisoned with a hundred men, was built among the Adaes, and the abandoned missions, of which scarcely a vestige had remained, were restored and supplied with ministers. Fray Antonio took charge of San Miguel, and in the hope

⁴⁴ Arricivita, *op. cit.*, p. 101; Espinosa, *Crónica*, p. 467. Consult also the *Solis Diary* of 1767. This *Diary*, translated for the first time by the author of the present article, was published in the *Preliminary Studies* of the Texas Catholic Historical Society in March, 1931. Another translation, by Miss Margaret Kenney Kress, of the Department of Spanish of Texas University, appeared in the July, 1931, issue of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.

⁴⁵ Peña, *Derrotero de la Expedición en la Provincia de los Texas*. (Museo Nacional de México; Departamento de la Biblioteca Nacional, Legajo 94, No. 20). This *Diary* has not as yet been translated, but numerous references to it can be found in the scholarly article, "The Aguayo Expedition into Texas and Louisiana," written by Miss Eleanor Claire Buckley and published in the July, 1911, issue of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.

⁴⁶ Arricivita, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁷ Miss Buckley, *op. cit.*, p. 38, states that toward the end of May "the expedition camped on what is now Onion Creek, and crossed it later, apparently at the site of the present McKinney Falls."

⁴⁸ Peña, *op. cit.*

of reaping a rich harvest in that land that had lain fallow during his long period of absence, he became, so to say, one of the natives, helped them in their daily tasks, and shared their joys and their sorrows. Faithful always to his religious exercises, early each morning he said the Divine Office and Holy Mass with scrupulous attention and devotion, and spent several hours daily in mental prayer, spiritual reading and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. His bed was a black sheet spread over the ground and his pillow the trunk of a tree, but frequently he denied himself even the three hours set apart for repose, for, as one of the religious who had labored with him on those missions testified years afterwards, on many occasions Fray Antonio passed the entire night on his knees in communion with God. On Good Friday of 1722, he spent several hours in retirement, meditating upon the mystery of the Redemption; at 5 o'clock in the afternoon he left his cell, gathered the natives into the church, and there, after speaking for one hour on the sufferings and death of Christ, made the Stations, explaining in the most touching terms the excruciating pains endured by the God-Man along the Sorrowful Way to Calvary.

About this time the Royal *Audiencia* of Guatemala informed the Commissary-General for the Indies that much dissension and discord had broken out in that kingdom and requested that Margil be sent there as mediator; but, after consultation with the Guardian and Council of Zacatecas College, the General concluded that for the present his services could not be spared at the new foundations, and decided to leave him in Texas. Appointed Prefect of the Missions *de Propaganda Fide* upon the death of Fray Francisco Estévez, one of Margil's first acts was to establish, with the assistance of Fray Agustín Patrón, and near the site now occupied by the Town of Victoria, the Mission of Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga for the savage Karankawas.⁴⁹

RECALLED TO ZACATECAS

Margil continued his efforts to congregate the Indians of East Texas; he continued, by word and example, his efforts to bring back into the fold the sheep that for two years had been left without a shepherd, that had wandered off to the woods and to the mountains during his forced absence at San Antonio; but,

⁴⁹ Bolton, *op. cit.*, p. 284. Consult also Engelhardt's article in the April, 1916, number of the *Franciscan Herald*.

in the summer of 1722, when most busily occupied in these truly pastoral duties, he received the obedience to report to Zacatecas as Guardian of the College of Guadalupe. Having appointed a successor as superior of the Texas missions, he set out on his journey, and in June arrived in Zacatecas, where, after that long absence of eight years, he was given an enthusiastic and hearty welcome by the inhabitants and also by his fellow-religious at Guadalupe.

At the beginning of the new year he visited Mexico City, accompanied by Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa, who was now Guardian of the college in Querétaro, and during his stay of three months, awaiting certain concessions in behalf of the Texas missions, addressed large audiences in the Convento Grande de San Francisco and in other churches of the capital. With the Viceroy's assurance that the interests of those missions would not be neglected, he set out again for Zacatecas, but upon reaching Querétaro he stopped to visit the religious, and at their request preached several sermons in that city. A few days after his return to Zacatecas he was taken ill with ulcers of the liver, and his condition became so alarming that the doctors gave up all hope of his recovery and advised that he be given the last sacraments. But, in answer to the fervent prayers offered by the Friars at Guadalupe and Santa Cruz and by all with whom he had come in contact, and who had learned of his illness, God saw fit to restore him to health in order that he might continue his work in the monastery and on the missions.

There is no need of recounting here his many acts of virtue and penance in the cloister or his apostolic labors in the pulpit and confessional during his term as Guardian; suffice it to say that in the former he practiced to an eminent degree those virtues of prudence, charity and self-denial that had always won for him the love and esteem of his fellow-religious, and in the latter that spirit of self-sacrificing zeal that had always characterized his work on the missions.

In keeping with the rules of the Order, at the Chapter, convoked on February 17, 1725, new officers were named for the College of Guadalupe; but, as Fray Ignacio Herice, the newly elected Guardian, was then in Texas the community requested that Margil remain in office until his successor reached Zaca-

tecas.⁵⁰ When Father Herice arrived, six months later, Margil, to prepare for further work on the missions, took leave of his companions, and, with the approval of his superiors, retired to a place of solitude about five leagues from the college. Here he spent several weeks in prayer and penance, and left this retreat only on feast days in order to devote himself to the work of the ministry.

Upon his return to the college he learned that the people of Guadalajara had solicited his mediation in the adjustment of serious differences existing between certain factions in their city, and, on the advice of his superior and that of one of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, he decided to act as arbiter and to pay a visit to that capital. On the afternoon of October 18th he bade good-bye to his fellow-religious, begged them to pardon any faults or offenses of which he might have been guilty, and left that holy institute. The following day, upon reaching the summit of a hill that dominated the surrounding country, he stopped for a few moments, looked back upon the College of Guadalupe, which loomed up in the distance, and which he was never again to see, and, imparting to it his last blessing and having, no doubt, a foreknowledge of the glorious work still to be accomplished by its members and of the cruel persecution to which they were one day to be subjected, he turned his back upon the City of Zacatecas, and, with a heavy heart, continued his journey toward the southwest. The impartial student of history cannot but admire and appreciate the stupendous work done by those saintly religious in Tarahumara and in Upper and Lower California after the enactment of that iniquitous decree which banished the sons of the great Ignatius from all Spanish dominions in 1767; and he is of necessity filled with righteous indignation when, little less than a century later,⁵¹ he finds a similar decree of secularization levelled at the missionaries of Zacatecas and when he pictures those poor, barefooted followers of Saint Francis, men that had sacrificed everything the world holds dear in order to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of God, leaving the College of Guadalupe and,

⁵⁰ Vilaplana, who has taken most of his data and much of his phraseology from Espinosa, states that this Chapter was held on February 22nd. Espinosa states that the *election* took place on this date. Sotomayor, in his list of the Chapters of the Zacatecas Province, tells us (*op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 367) that the fifth was convened on February 17, 1725.

⁵¹ August 1, 1859.

possessed of nothing but their breviaries, making their way southward toward the Town of Cholula.

On November 3rd Margil reached Guadalajara, where he remained for more than six weeks, reestablishing peace and harmony among its citizens, preaching the word of God in the various churches, and bringing cheer and comfort to the inmates of the prison and to the sick in the hospitals. On December 20th he left this city, and for more than four months gave missions in Ascatán, Piedad, Puruándiro and other towns in the vicinity of Lake Chapala. At some of these places the inhabitants swept and strewed with flowers the roads over which he was to pass; at others they erected triumphal arches in his honor, walked long distances to meet him and, with bands playing, accompanied him to the churches in procession. In order to escape these outward manifestations of veneration and in order to reach the numerous souls still in need of his ministrations, on more than one occasion that humble and zealous Friar was compelled to leave a town under the cover of darkness; but, though sorely in need of rest and though suffering from double hernia and from an ulcer in one of his arms and another in one of his feet, at the end of the day's journey he never failed to spend long hours in the pulpit and in the confessional.

HIS LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

On the night of May 1st Margil arrived in Valladolid, and there was so busily engaged for the remainder of the month that he became dangerously ill, developed a malignant fever and was confined to bed for several days.⁵² Partly restored to health, he left for Acámbaro, where he opened a two weeks' mission on June 15th. On July 7th he reached the College of Santa Cruz in Querétaro. Here his condition became so alarming that the Commissary-General, hoping that with proper medical attention he might find some alleviation from his sufferings, suggested that he go to the community infirmary at the Convento Grande in Mexico City. One of the Fathers at Santa Cruz tried out of compassion to dissuade him from making that long journey, warning him that if he persisted in doing so he would probably die along the way, without a doctor, medicine, or Christian burial. To this Fray Antonio replied: "That is what I deserve;

⁵² The present City of Morelia, capital of the State of Michoacán.

I am not entitled to Christian burial; I ought to die out in the wilds, where the beasts can devour me."⁵³

On July 21st he left Santa Cruz, that institute from which, some forty years previously, he had been sent to the missions in Central America, and, in compliance with the wishes of his superior, began the long, wearisome journey to Mexico City. He preached at San Juan del Río on the 24th, at Cazadero on the 27th, and, burning with fever, traveled on past Ruano and Capulapa till, on the 30th, he came to the Town of San Francisco, sixteen leagues from the capital. The afternoon of his arrival to San Francisco he was obliged to leave the confessional because of an attack of chills and fever, but, although unable to sleep that night, he went to the church on the following day, feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and for the last time in his life offered up the Holy Sacrifice. A heavy rain had fallen during the night, and on the way to the church in which he was to celebrate Fray Antonio contracted a severe cold, which soon developed into pneumonia. This same day, however, he mounted a horse, rode as far as Tepejí that night, and on the following day, August 1st, reached the Town of Cuautitlán. The next morning he felt too weak to continue the journey on horseback, but, having secured a carriage, he traveled on, and that evening, as the sun was sinking back of the Cordillera de las Cruces, reached the Convento Grande de San Francisco. Casting himself on his knees at the door of the convent church, he adored his Eucharistic Lord, present in the tabernacle, and then, assisted by two of the religious, climbed the steps leading to one of the cells in the community infirmary.

Informed that there was no chance of his recovery, that saintly religious, weighed down by old age and infirmities, but happy in the thought that he was soon to be united with Him for whom he had labored so long and so faithfully, rose from his death bed, knelt down on the bare floor, and made a general confession of his whole life to Fray Manuel de las Heras, who for several years had been professor of sacred theology in the Province of San Pedro y San Pablo in Michoacán and who, later on, had assisted Fray Antonio on the missions. But, the servant of God had little of which to accuse himself before appearing before the Supreme Tribunal, for at the age of discretion he had

⁵³ Vilaplana, *op. cit.*, p. 177. Navarro, *Oración Fúnebre*, p. 38: *apud* "Láurea Funeral Americana." (Valencia, 1729.)

placed himself in the arms of Christ Crucified and, according to the testimonies of Fray Manuel de las Heras, Fray Isidro Félix de Espinosa and his other spiritual advisers, he had modeled his life after that of Saint Anthony of Padua and had never lost his baptismal innocence.

On August 4th he received the Holy Viaticum with that same fervor and devotion that he had always manifested in the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. On the 5th one of the Friars administered Extreme Unction, and after receiving this sacrament Fray Antonio addressed a few words of parting to the brethren that had gathered into his cell, thanked them for the tender care with which they had nursed him during his illness, and begged them not to grow tepid or lukewarm in the discharge of their religious duties and never to abandon the institute. Finally, shortly before 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, August 6, 1726, feast of the Transfiguration, with the words *Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum*⁵⁴ upon his lips, and as the community intoned the canticle, *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace*,⁵⁵ he yielded up his soul in peace to its Creator.

An hour later, after the tolling of the cathedral and convent bells had announced to the people of the capital the passing of the great missionary of America, words of sympathy and sorrow were exchanged in all parts of the city, and the children in the streets and on the plazas could have been heard crying: "The Saint has died! Holy Fray Antonio is dead!" Anxious to apply medals, rosaries and other articles to those hands that had so often been raised in benediction and to kiss those feet that for so many years had trodden the ways of peace, both clergy and laity flocked in such numbers to the small infirmary chapel in which the body was being waked that the superior, to satisfy their pious devotion, ordered that it be taken down to the convent church. On August 8th the Viceroy, the judges of the *Audiencia* and many other royal officials, as well as large representations from all the religious Orders, repaired to the Convento Grande de San Francisco; and there, after the Solemn Mass of Requiem, which was attended by the largest concourse that had ever gathered in the capital, the mortal remains of him

⁵⁴ "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready," Psalm CVII, 2.

⁵⁵ "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace," *Canticle of Simeon*, Luke II, 29.

who during life had sought neither honors nor distinctions, and who had always styled himself *la misma nada*, were laid to rest in a vault near the foot of the altar of San Diego on the Gospel side of the sanctuary. In 1861, they were removed to the cathedral, to be placed in a niche in the Chapel of la Virgen de la Soledad, and today they repose in that of la Inmaculada Concepción. Engraved on a metal plate affixed to the coffin could have been read the following inscription:

HIC JACET SEPULTUS, VENERABILIS SERVUS DEI
PATER FRATER ANTONIUS MARGIL, MISSIONARIUS,
PRAEFECTUS, ET GUARDIANUS COLLEGIORUM DE
PROPAGANDA FIDE SANCTAE CRUCIS DE QUERE-
TARO, SANCTISSIMI CRUCIFIXI DE GUATEMALA,
ET SANCTAE MARIAE DE GUADALUPE IN HAC
NOVA HISPANIA ERECTORUM: FAMA UTIQUE
VIRTUTUM, MIRACULORUMQUE ILLUSTRIS.

OBIT IN HOC PERCELEBRI

MEXICANO CONVENTU

Die VI. Augusti Anno

Dni. M.DCC.XXVI.⁵⁶

We had proposed to present here a compendious life of Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, but, we have come to realize the impossibility of such a task; we have come to realize, perhaps more fully than any of our readers, the utter impossibility of recounting in these few pages the activities of one who spent more than forty years, journeying thousands of leagues, climbing dizzy heights, crossing swollen rivers, and making his way, barefoot, over the burning sands of the deserts, in the endeavor to win souls for God. Of his theological and moral virtues, of his power of working miracles, of his gift of tongues and of his other *gratiae gratis datae*, so beautifully and so minutely described by Espinosa and by his other biographers and contemporaries, we have said almost nothing. We trust, however, that the ardent hope expressed at the beginning of this treatise may soon be realized, that another and a finer pen may before long

⁵⁶ Here lies buried the Venerable servant of God, Father Fray Antonio Margil, Missionary, Prefect, and Guardian of the colleges *de Propaganda Fide* of Santa Cruz in Querétaro, Cristo Crucificado in Guatemala, and Our Lady of Guadalupe, erected in this New Spain. Famous for his virtues and miracles, he died in this celebrated Convent of Mexico on the 6th day of August, in the year of Our Lord, 1726.

depict in a befitting manner the life and activities of this great soldier of Christ.

Shortly after Fray Antonio's death the Sacred Congregation of Rites, in answer to persistent appeals from the peoples of Central and of North America, ordered that the preliminary processes, or judicial inquiries, for the cause of beatification and canonization be begun in the principal centers in which he had carried on his missionary labors, and, in compliance with this order, postulators were appointed for Mexico City, Guadalajara and Guatemala. The results of these processes having been taken to Rome, several of the miracles wrought through his intercession were approved by Pope Pius VII, and it is our humble opinion that at that time he would have been beatified had not important documents relating to the processes been lost upon the entrance of the French armies into the Eternal City in 1797. These documents reappeared miraculously later on, and, in 1836, the Sacred Congregation approved the introduction of his cause, the virtues of the noted missionary were declared heroic, and a decree conferring upon him the title of Venerable was promulgated by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Gregory XVI.

At the present time interest has been reawakened in the cause of this servant of God, with the hope that in 1936, centennial of the promulgation of the decree of Gregory XVI, he may be elevated to the dignity of our altars. It is in the belief that our readers will by their prayers hasten that blessed day that we have undertaken to publish this simple, yet faithful, account of the life of him who civilized nations, established *pueblos*, erected churches and baptized innumerable souls, and who, nevertheless, always styled himself *la misma nada*.

PETER P. FORRESTAL

St. Edward's University
Austin, Texas











